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ABSTRACT

In 1994 the Kaiser Family Foundation commissioned a monitoring project which assessed the frequency and representation of sexual behaviors in five daytime television soap operas. A new study sought to provide up-to-date quantitative information and to extend the previous project by examining more specifically the representation of planning for and consequences of sexual activity, and by increasing the sample size to include all 10 nationally televised daytime soap operas. When appropriate, the study makes comparisons with the previous research. This study examined 10 hours of each of the 10 nationally televised daytime soap operas during the 5-week period from May 27 to June 28, 1996. All sexual behaviors--both visual and verbal-- were classified according to the type depicted or talked about, characteristics of participants, presence of discussion and/or depiction of planning for sexual activity, and motivation for and outcome of sexual activity for participants. Overall, across the 97 hours of programming reviewed, a total of 594 individual sexual behaviors were identified. Findings confirm that sex remains a key element of soap opera storylines. In a marked shift from previous analyses, including the 1994 study, sexual activity was found to be primarily visually depicted, although most depictions were not of sexual intercourse. There is a range of sexual activity represented on televised soap operas, and most of it occurs within the context of committed, heterosexual relationships, with the majority of interactions having clear outcomes. (Contains 6 tables of data, 11 references, and an appendix on methodology.) (NKA)

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THE HENRY J. KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION

Sexual Activity on Daytime Soap Operas: A Content Analysis of Five Weeks of Television Programming

Prepared for the Kaiser Family Foundation

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INTRODUCTION

Two concerns led to this study of the depiction and discussion of sexual behaviors and relationships in popular media. First, there is evidence from a number of research studies that heavy exposure to sexually-oriented media content can influence the ways viewers feel about themselves, their relationships, and what is "normal" sexual behavior (for a review of the research, see Greenberg, Brown, & Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1993). Heavy users of media are more likely than light viewers to believe in the accuracy of the messages and to use them as reference points for evaluating their own experiences. These influences are even more pronounced for viewers with little real world experience with which to compare the media portrayals. Media messages can also provide attractive models for viewers to imitate. When characters are shown as powerful, prestigious, and rewarded for their behaviors, viewers - especially younger ones - are more likely to learn and imitate the behaviors. Because of this, media consumed by adolescents and others who are beginning their sexual lives is of special concern. For a review of the research on media effects on behavior and attitudes, see *Sex and the Mass Media*, Jane Brown for Kaiser Family Foundation, 1995.

The second reason for concern is the indication that popular media are investing more time in sexual themes that are increasingly more explicit (Logan, 1992; Logan, 1993; Ward, 1995). One study discovered a twenty-fold increase in the amount of sexual content on television from the 1950s to the 1990s (Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman, 1993). Another recent study found that one-third of all prime time interactions examined in 1995 included sexual references, amounting to nearly ten sexual interactions per ½ hour program episode (Ward, 1995). Sexual interactions during prime time are frequently set in humorous contexts (Sapolsky and Tabarlet, 1990) and rarely include discussion or depiction of contraception, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), or STD transmission (Lowry and Towles, 1989).

Daytime serials have high levels of sexual content, and in recent years some soap operas have incorporated into storylines once-taboo topics like homosexuality, transsexuality, and oral sex as well as AIDS, abstinence, and contraception. Studies conducted during the 1980s and 1990s consistently found intercourse to be the most frequently occurring sexual behavior, although verbal references were far more common than visual, which includes both implied as well as depicted references (Greenberg and D'Alessio, 1985; Greenberg and Busselle, 1994; Olson, 1995; Lowry and Towles, 1989). These studies also found little attention paid to the consequences of sexual activity, such as pregnancy and/or STDs.

Since research indicates that heavy exposure to such media depictions can influence the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of heavy viewers, it is important to have an accurate estimate of the media content. How frequently are these once-taboo topics and other more conventional sexual representations depicted, and in what context? To what extent are planning and consequences related to sexual activity discussed and depicted? Before we can speculate on the impact of such representations, we must first accurately describe them.

In 1994, the Kaiser Family Foundation commissioned a monitoring project which assessed the frequency and representation of sexual behaviors in five daytime soap operas. That study found that sexual behaviors occurred approximately 6.6 times per hour long episode and that intercourse occurred more frequently than any other single type of behavior coded. It also found that intercourse was three times more likely to be talked about than visually depicted and, that combined sexual behaviors other than intercourse accounted for most sexual activity on soap operas. Overall, sexual behaviors were twice as likely to be verbal as visual. The 1994 study found five discussions of safe sex and/or contraception, and a single mention of AIDS.

This study provides new up-to-date quantitative information, and extends the previous project by examining more specifically the representation of planning for and consequences of sexual activity, and by increasing the sample size to include all ten nationally televised daytime soap operas. Where appropriate, this project attempts to make comparisons with the previous research.

METHODOLOGY

This study examined ten hours* of each of the ten nationally televised daytime soap operas airing during the five week period from May 27 to June 28, 1996. (* Due to an error in video tape transferring, one episode from each of the three hour-long CBS programs was lost, making the sample total 97 hours of programming.)

While this is usually considered an ample number of hours of television programming for analysis, the nature of the soap opera genre warrants a caveat here. Due to the nature of plot and story development in soap operas, as well as their longevity, one month is a very small slice of the life of most soap operas. Both the Kaiser Family Foundation and the author recognize that we cannot conclude that this one month snapshot is representative of the entire content of soap operas. Our selection might include atypical storylines and might exclude special emphases occurring outside our time frame. However, the selection of content over a five-week period does allow for some development in storylines and provides a sample large enough for a complete description of the content during this selected time period.

All sexual behaviors - both visual and verbal - were classified according to:

1. The type(s) of behavior depicted and/or talked about
2. Characteristics of participants
3. Presence of discussion and/or depiction of planning for and/or consequences of sexual activity
4. Motivation for and outcome of sexual activity for participants.

For the purposes of this report, *planning activities* included discussion or depiction of preventive measures taken by one or both partners to achieve a planned pregnancy or to prevent an unplanned pregnancy or STD. *Consequences* referred to the situation of becoming pregnant and/or acquiring an STD.

For a more complete discussion of the methodology, see Appendix A.

RESULTS

Overall, across the 97 hours of programming reviewed, we identified a total of 594 individual sexual behaviors. Some of these behaviors occur simultaneously or within the context of the same interaction (i.e. kissing and petting; talking and kissing; petting leading to intercourse). Analysis of the sexual content of the ten soap operas showed the following major findings:

1. The overall amount of specific sexual behaviors remains relatively consistent with previous studies, including the 1994 Kaiser Family Foundation study.

2. In a marked shift from the 1994 Kaiser Family Foundation study, sexual behaviors were twice as likely to be visual than verbal depictions, although most visually depicted behaviors involved "modest" sexual behaviors, such as kissing and caressing.

3. Discussion and depiction of planning and consequences of sexual activity has increased slightly since the 1994 Kaiser Family Foundation study, but is largely confined to a few discrete storylines dealing with consequences.

4. Most sexual interactions occurred between participants involved in established relationships with each other (i.e. married, engaged or monogamous long-term relationships).

5. Most sexual activity is shown to have had a positive effect on the participants' relationships.

Amount of Sexual Activity

The overall amount of sexual content on soap operas remains relatively consistent with previous studies, including the 1994 Kaiser Family Foundation study. The 97 hours of programming contained 594 individual sexual behaviors or 6.12 sexual behaviors per program hour. This rate is relatively consistent with past studies which reported per hour rates ranging from 4.8 (Olson, 1994) to 7.4 behaviors (Lowry and Towles, 1989). The 1994 Kaiser Family Foundation study discovered 6.6 "sexual incidents" (the equivalent of this study's classification of ***behavior***) per hour.

The 1994 Kaiser Family Foundation study used the term "incident" to refer to individual behaviors and identified just one incident per interaction. In this study, we wanted to better contextualize the sexual behaviors and make it possible to see relationships between individual behaviors that occur either simultaneously or in succession within an interaction. For this reason, this study considered a discussion or depiction of sexual behavior within a scene to be a ***sexual interaction*** which could contain multiple individual ***sexual behaviors***. As well, interactions that span two or more scenes were coded as sequences. These ***sequences*** of interactions allow us to see relationships between individual behaviors and understand better the context within which sexual activity occurs.

Twenty-nine percent of the interactions continued through two or more separate scenes, indicating that there were a total of 346 sequences of sexual interactions occurring in the episodes sampled. This amounts to 4.3 interactions per program hour, or 3.6 sequences of sexual interactions per program hour. While this is the average across program hours, the sample included episodes with no codable interactions and others with as many as 14.

Types of Sexual Behavior

These sexual behaviors were classified as either verbal: talk about sexual activity and sexual/seductive talk, as well as both discussions of planning and/or consequences when they occurred; or visual: overt behavior involving sexuality or overt behavior involving planning for or consequences of sexual activity. Visual depictions could be either implied or depicted. For example, intercourse was considered ***implied*** if the characters were shown cuddling in bed, apparently nude, and making reference to intercourse activity just completed. Intercourse was considered ***depicted*** if the characters were shown in bed, apparently nude, bodies on top of one another, kissing and moving in a way suggesting intercourse. In the 1994 Kaiser Family Foundation study, sexual behaviors were twice as likely to be visual than verbal depictions.

Nearly three-fourths (73%) of the behaviors coded were visual depictions, while just 27% were exclusively verbal. This might indicate a shift in portrayals from 1994 to the present. The 1994 Kaiser Family Foundation study discovered twice as many verbal as visual sexual behaviors.

Table 1 indicates the frequency of individual behaviors in the sample. Table 2 provides comparisons between the results of the 1994 Kaiser Family Foundation study and the current study.

TABLE 1
FREQUENCY OF SEXUAL BEHAVIORS: DISCUSSIONS AND DEPICTIONS

TYPE OF BEHAVIOR	NUMBER OF BEHAVIORS	PERCENT OF ALL BEHAVIORS	FREQUENCY PER HOUR
Verbal/Discussions	**160**	**27%**	**1.65**
Talk about or relating to Sexual Intercourse (Not including discussions of planning and/or consequences)	66	11	0.68
Discussions of planning	12	2	0.12
Discussions of consequences	41	7	0.42
Other	7	1	0.07
Sexual/Seductive talk	34	6	0.35
Visual/Depictions (implied & actual)	**434**	**73%**	**4.47**
Sexual Activities other than Sexual Intercourse:			
Flirting	10	2	0.10
Romantic Touch/Embrace	85	14	0.88
Intimate Dancing	19	3	0.20
Modest Kiss	103	17	1.06
Passionate Kiss	165	28	1.70
Petting/Fondling/Caressing	30	5	0.31
* Condom Display	4		
Sexual Activity - Intercourse:			
Sexual Intercourse - Implied	8	1.5	0.08
Sexual Intercourse - Depicted	9	1.5	0.09
* Condom Display	1		
Consequences of Sexual Activity:			
Prenatal Care	2	0.5	0.02
HIV/AIDS Care	3	0.5	0.03
TOTAL	594	100%	6.12

* Indicates a condom was shown in association with the noted sexual behavior. Appearance of a condom was not recorded as a separate sexual behavior.

TABLE 2

SEXUAL CONTENT COMPARISONS: 1994 AND 1996

TYPE OF ACTIVITY	1994		1996	
	FREQUENCY (incidents)	AVG. PER HOUR	FREQUENCY (behaviors)	AVG. PER HOUR
Visual depictions of Intercourse	39	.78	17	.19
Verbal discussions about Intercourse	56	1.12	66	.68
Petting/Caressing	7	.14	30	.31
Passionate Kisses	57	1.14	165	1.66
Discussions of "safe sex", contraception, and AIDS	5	.10	9	.09
Homosexual activity	0	-	0	-
Prostitution	7	.14	27	.28
Rape	71	1.40	13	.14

Note: The 1994 study sampled 10 hours from each of the 5 most highly-rated television soap operas, for a total of 50 hours. The 1996 study sampled 10 hours from each of the 10 currently broadcast soap operas, for a total of 97 hours. Although these samples are not identical, the per hour rates of sexual behavior in each sample fall within the range established by a number of studies conducted in the same time period, indicating that these samples can be considered representative of soap opera programming. Thus, even though the 1996 sample is twice the size of the 1994 sample, it is still valid to make general comparisons between them.

Overall, the most frequent type of behavior depicted was kissing, both short/modest and long/passionate. Kissing was depicted in over 45% of all coded behaviors. Kissing occurred most frequently between couples who were either involved in an established romantic relationship, or who were making the transition from friendship to a romantic relationship. Fully 90% of the couples engaging in modest kissing and 85% of the passionate kiss participants fell into these categories.

The next most frequent type of behavior identified involved either discussion or depiction of sexual intercourse. Approximately a quarter (22%) of the total sexual behaviors coded included either verbal or visual references to sexual intercourse, the vast majority being verbal discussion of one's own or another's sexual activities.

Most of the talk about sexual intercourse occurs between characters who are not sexually or romantically involved. The context of these discussions is more likely to be between friends, coworkers, or family members than between romantic partners. When romantic partners do engage in talk about their own or others' sexual activities, however, those couples in established relationships were shown more often to discuss planning and consequences of these activities.

There were 17 visual acts of intercourse (implied or depicted) identified out of the 594 behaviors in the sample. The interactions depicting intercourse were likely also to include other behaviors leading up to or following intercourse (i.e. seductive talk, kissing, petting). There was only one interaction in which intercourse was the only behavior coded. Only one out of seventeen of the interactions depicting intercourse occurred between a couple who discussed protection.

When sexual intercourse is depicted visually, it is almost always shown to be within the context of a committed relationship. Sixteen of the seventeen interactions occurred between couples who were involved in established relationships. The remaining interaction involved a couple beginning an adulterous relationship.

When examining the level of explicitness in scenes, it is clear that as the level of intimacy increases, so does the level of explicitness. Although visual depictions of sexual intercourse were infrequent in this sample, they tended to be the most visually explicit interactions, offering a perspective to the viewer which made it clear that participants were fully nude. This generally meant a character's back and legs exposed from under bed covers, bare shoulders emerging from a swimming pool, or depictions of a negligee or boxers falling to the floor around bare legs.

Of the 118 discussions about sexual intercourse, 44% included some discussion of either planning for or the consequences of sexual activity. There were ten visual depictions of either planning or consequence related activities, however only one of these occurred during a scene in which intercourse was visually depicted.

Most planning and consequence discussions and depictions deal with the issue of pregnancy - mostly planned pregnancy - as opposed to STDs, AIDS, or prevention of unplanned pregnancies. It is important to note as well that these discussions/depictions were not evenly distributed throughout all programs. Rather, they occurred in a small number of programs in a few discrete storylines.

Table 3 presents the frequency of planning and consequence activities.

TABLE 3

FREQUENCY OF PLANNING AND CONSEQUENCE DISCUSSION AND DEPICTIONS

TYPE OF BEHAVIOR	FREQUENCY		
	N	% OF P/C BEHAVIORS* (N=58)	% OF TOTAL BEHAVIORS (N=594)
Planning Behaviors	**12**	**29%**	**2%**
To achieve pregnancy	7	11	1
- Verbal	7	11	1
- Visual	0	-	-
To avoid pregnancy	2	3	0.3
- Verbal	2	3	0.3
- Visual/condom**	4		
To avoid STD/AIDS	2	3	0.3
- Verbal	2	3	0.3
- Visual/condom**	1		
Consequence Behaviors	**46**	**79%**	**8%**
Related to Pregnancy	35	56	6
Planned	20	32	3
- Verbal	18	29	3
- Visual	2	3	0.3
Unplanned	14	22	2
- Verbal	14	22	2
- Visual	0	-	-
Unknown	1	2	0.2
- Verbal	1	2	0.2
- Visual	0	-	-
HIV/AIDS Transmission	11	17	2
- Verbal	8	13	1
- Visual	3	5	0.5
Other STD Transmission	0	-	-

*P/C Behaviors = Planning/Consequence Behaviors.

** Indicates a condom was shown. Appearance of a condom was not recorded as a separate sexual behavior.

Planning discussions/depictions: Discussions about sex were considered to include *a planning discussion* if at least one participant spoke about his/her plans to achieve a wanted pregnancy or avoid an unwanted pregnancy and/or STD during sexual activity. Depictions of sexual behaviors were considered to include *planning depictions* if at least one partner demonstrated behaviors related to achieving a wanted pregnancy or avoiding an unwanted pregnancy or STD.

Eleven discussions (9% of all discussion pertaining to sexual intercourse) included some mention of planning related to pregnancy or HIV/AIDS. Most of these discussions dealt with planning pregnancy as opposed to STD prevention, and participants were three times more likely to discuss planning to achieve pregnancy (n=7) rather than avoid pregnancy (n=2). Most of the discussion of pregnancy planning featured characters discussing with a friend or family member their desire to achieve pregnancy with their partners.

The only two discussions related to planning to avoid pregnancy both occurred on All My Children (ABC). A teen-aged girl who contemplated having intercourse with her boyfriend discussed pregnancy prevention measures with her boyfriend in one interaction and her sister in another interaction.

AIDS/HIV prevention was the topic of discussion in two interactions on General Hospital (ABC). In both interactions, an HIV-positive character discussed with her partner the precautions they would need to take to protect him from becoming infected if they decided to have sexual intercourse.

One visual depiction of sexual intercourse included visual display of a condom (General Hospital, ABC). In the total sample, there were five depictions of condoms, although only one occurred in the context of sexual intercourse. The other four depictions occurred on All My Children (ABC) in interactions between a young couple who are contemplating becoming sexually active. Although they were never shown engaging in sexual intercourse, they did display a condom in four separate interactions in which they engaged in other types of sexual behaviors (i.e. kissing, petting). When condoms are displayed, they are shown unwrapped and are referenced as a "condom" (as opposed to "protection," "rubber," etc.). In four interactions, the condom is displayed during preliminary activity and discussion (All My Children, ABC). In one interaction (General Hospital, ABC) the male character rips open the package with his teeth as he and his partner prepare for sexual intercourse.

Consequence discussions/depictions: Discussions about sex were considered to address *consequences* if at least one participant spoke about a pregnancy or a STD-related outcome of past sexual activity. Depictions of sexual activity were considered to demonstrate *consequences* if at least one participant demonstrated behaviors and/or the physical signs of pregnancy and/or STDs.

Forty-one of the discussions about sexual intercourse (35% of all discussions about sexual intercourse) included some mention of the consequences of past sexual activity. Thirty-three of these discussions related to pregnancy and eight to HIV/AIDS transmission.

Most of the pregnancy discussions occurred in three storylines on three soap operas. On Days of Our Lives (NBC), a woman finally became pregnant and much discussion revolved around her fear of miscarriage. On The Young and the Restless (CBS), a young woman became pregnant unexpectedly and engaged in a number of discussions with her mother and others about how to tell her husband, who had already made it clear he was not ready for parenthood. The other major source of such discussion was All My Children (ABC), in which seven discussions focused on a teen-aged mother's decision to fight for the custody of a child she had previously given up for adoption. In one discussion, an older friend of the teenager revealed that she, too, had had an unplanned pregnancy as a teen and had given her baby up for adoption.

Finally, the discussions related to HIV/AIDS transmission occurred on two soaps: General Hospital (ABC) and The Young and the Restless (CBS) and involved ongoing characters in major storylines. On General Hospital (ABC), the context of a benefit ball to raise money for AIDS research set the stage for general discussion about the disease as well as more specific mention of the HIV-positive character's experience. It is important to note here, too, the presence of a public service announcement at the end of one episode in which the actor who portrays the HIV-positive character encouraged sexually active viewers to protect themselves during sexual activity and to get tested for HIV if they'd been engaging in risky sexual behaviors.

The other storyline to feature HIV/AIDS as a consequence of sexual activity occurred on The Young and the Restless (CBS). In this storyline, a woman discussed her desire to have herself and her young son tested for HIV after discovering that her ex-husband had an affair during their marriage with a woman who had recently died of AIDS. It was unclear during the sample time period if the ex-husband was infected.

The consequences of sexual activity were visually depicted five times. In one depiction, a (non-pregnant) woman fantasized about giving birth to her lover's baby. (The childbirth, although a fantasy, was considered a consequence of the couples' actual sexual intercourse.) In another interaction, a pregnant woman visited her doctor for a routine prenatal exam. Finally, a sequence of three depictions involved a mother and son getting tested for HIV after the unfaithful husband revealed that a woman with whom he had had an affair had died of AIDS.

Sexual/Seductive talk

Sexual/seductive talk occurred 35 times in the sample. Only one such discussion included any mention of contraceptive use. Forty-two percent of these interactions (n=15) also included some behavioral component, indicating that seductive talk often led to sexual activity ***within the same interaction***. Ten of the discussions were shown to link to other interactions in the same episode, indicating that sexual talk often led to sexual behavior ***later in the program***. In just ten cases (28%), sexual talk did not lead to sexual behavior within the same episode.

Other overt sexual behavior

Sexually suggestive/flirtatious behaviors occurred ten times in the sample. Romantic touches and embraces without kisses occurred 40 and 45 times respectively, accounting for about 14% of all sexual behaviors coded. Intimate dancing was featured in 19 depictions and petting/fondling/caressing in 30 depictions.

As with the behaviors discussed earlier, these types of sexual interactions were more likely to occur between couples in an established relationship. Eighty percent of the interactions involving romantic touches, embraces, or petting featured participants in established relationships, while nearly 2/3 of the intimate dancing occurred between established couples.

Attributes of Sexual Interactions

Tone: Sexual activity in soap operas is a much more serious enterprise than it is during most prime time programs. Contrary to past findings that sexual activity during prime time is shown primarily in humorous contexts (Sapolsky and Tabarlet, 1990), this study classified only 6% of the interactions as light-hearted/playful. Table 4 shows the tone of the interactions in this study.

TABLE 4

TONE OF INTERACTION BY BEHAVIOR TYPE

BEHAVIOR TYPE	TONE					
	Heavily Dramatic		Moderately Dramatic		Light-hearted/ Playful	
	N	% of Total Behaviors	N	% of Total Behaviors	N	% of Total Behaviors
Talk about sexual activity	32	5	89	15	1	0.2
Sexual/seductive talk	7	1	26	4	2	0.3
Overt sexual behavior	21	3.5	379	64	31	5
Overt planning or consequence behaviors	1	0.2	3	0.5	1	0.2
TOTAL	61	9.7%	497	83.5%	35	5.7%

Note: Percentages are out of the total behaviors (N=594).

As the table indicates, a majority of the heavily dramatic interactions were verbal in nature, while the vast majority of the moderately dramatic and light hearten interactions contained visual depictions.

Drug or Alcohol Use: For 86% of the interactions, neither partner was shown using drugs or alcohol during the same episode. Seven percent (n=83) followed alcohol use by participants and others during the episode, while four percent (n=50) showed participants using alcohol with just their partners during the episode. Many of the sexual interactions occurred during or after parties or romantic dinners. Drugs were a prelude to sexual activity in three interactions (0.5), each involving a prostitute who supports her drug habit through prostitution.

Motivations for and Outcomes of Sexual Activity

Motivations: The motivations for engaging in sexual activity were coded for each participant. Motivations were determined from either visual or verbal cues from participants occurring either in the same scene or previously in the program. It was not unusual for one participant to say, for example: "I know what will make you forget that business meeting" before kissing, or for participants to verbally express their love before or during sexual activity. A list of potential motivations was created and modified during preliminary analyses to come up with the final list. For approximately 1/3 of the interactions, motive was either unavailable (behavior was in progress when scene began), unclear, or not applicable (behavior was talked about by non-participants). Table 5 shows the frequency of *identifiable* motivations for participants.

TABLE 5

PARTICIPANT MOTIVATIONS FOR SEXUAL INTERACTION

MOTIVATION	FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE N	% OF ALL MOTIVATIONS
Self-Motivated	**505**	**85.6%**
Establish or benefit relationship with partner	447	76%
Personal Satisfaction	16	3%
Further own career	15	3%
Revenge/trap partner	8	1%
Forget problems/escape	7	1%
Sexual assault	7	1%
Achieve pregnancy	2	0.3%
Gain status/prestige/popularity	2	0.3%
Material gain	1	0.2%
Other-Motivated	**18**	**3.4%**
Provide comfort for partner	16	3%
Provide satisfaction for partner	1	0.2%
Further partner's career	1	0.2%
Other	67	11%
TOTAL	590	100%

For those interactions where motive could be established (n=590), the vast majority of participants (75.7%) engaged in sexual activity for the purpose of establishing or benefiting their relationship with their partners. Approximately three percent were motivated by the desire for personal satisfaction, while another three percent desired to comfort their partners.

In sixteen interactions (3%), participants attempted to further either their own or their partner's careers through engaging in sexual activity. Revenge/trap, sexual assault, and escape each motivated only one percent of the interaction participants.

When deception is involved in the sexual relationship, the deceiver is likely to suffer negative repercussions. For example, in one storyline a male character takes a job as an exotic dancer as a way to earn money for college. He also contemplates prostitution, but decides against it out of love for his girlfriend. However, when his girlfriend finds out, she breaks up with him because of his deception.

In another storyline, a woman who drugged her sister's boyfriend and tricked him into having intercourse with her was engaged in a struggle with the sister over the boyfriend and custody of the child he fathered. Another woman who slept with her sister's boyfriend and became pregnant, miscarried the baby late in the pregnancy.

Deception can prove dangerous for the target of the deception as well. In one program, a woman and her son were being tested for HIV after finding out that the woman's ex-husband had a lover during their marriage who had recently died of AIDS. It was unclear if the ex-husband had contracted HIV.

Outcomes:

Both within scene and within episode outcomes were coded for each participant. Outcomes were identified only if there was an explicit connection made between the sexual activity and some mental, physical, or material state of the participant. Table 6 presents the frequency of occurrence of each type of outcome.

TABLE 6
OUTCOMES OF SEXUAL INTERACTION FOR PARTICIPANTS

OUTCOME	WITHIN-SCENE (Short -term)		WITHIN-EPISODE/ OUTSIDE SCENE (Longer-term)	
	N	%	N	%
Positive Outcomes				
Established/benefitted relationship with participant	432	83%	347	84%
Obtained personal satisfaction, self confidence	12	2%	7	2%
Established/benefitted relationship with friends and/or family	11	2%	15	3.6%
Career advancement	6	1%	2	0.5%
Gained compliance/loyalty from partner	2	0.4%	1	0.2%
Gained status/prestige/popularity	1	0.2%	1	0.2%
Other	-		1	0.2%
Negative Outcomes				
Damaged/ended relationship with participant	18	3%	13	3%
Damaged/ended relationship with friends and/or family	6	1%	6	1.4%
Damaged/ended relationship with romantic partner (if partner is not participant)	4	0.8%	13	3.1%
Experienced personal guilt/remorse	3	0.6%	1	0.2%
Diminished status/prestige/popularity	2	0.4%	-	
Hurt career	1	0.2%	-	
Other	21	4%	9	2.2%
TOTAL	519		416	

Note: Totals are different due to the increased difficulty identifying outcomes occurring outside of the scene of the interaction.

Within-scene outcomes: For approximately forty percent of the participants, within-scene outcomes were either unavailable (behavior was still in progress when scene ended), unclear, or not applicable (behavior was talked about by non-participants). For those interactions where within-scene outcomes could be established (n=519), an overwhelming majority (83.2%) benefited or established the participants' relationship with each other. An example of such an outcome was partners renewing their expressions of love (i.e. "You do know how much I love you, right?") after sexual activity.

In twenty-two instances (4.2%), the interaction damaged or ended participants' relationships with their partner. Half of the damaging interactions involved talk in which past sexual activities were revealed. The other half of the damaging interactions involved overt behaviors judged by one participant as inappropriate.

Within-episode outcomes: For approximately half of the participants, within-episode outcomes were either unavailable (participants were not seen again in the episode), unclear (interaction was not indicated to have had an effect), or not applicable (behavior was talked about by non-participants). For those interactions where within-episode outcomes could be established (n=416), an overwhelming majority (83.6%) benefitted or established the participants' relationship with each other. In fifteen interactions (3.6%), the interaction benefited participants' relationship with friends or family (not including their partner). Thirty-two interactions (7.7%) proved damaging for the participants, who experienced problems in their relationships with either their friends and family, their romantic partners, or with the person with whom they engaged sexually if this was someone other than their romantic partner.

Due to the nature of soap opera plots and the longevity of storylines, it is not unusual to find emphasis on topics during a one-month snapshot that might get little or no emphasis during the rest of the year. Similarly, the selection of one month in the life of a soap opera also necessarily excludes topics that may have been emphasized at another time. For this reason, it is not surprising that two topics show dramatically different emphases in the 1994 and 1996 studies.

Rape: In 1994, prominent rape storylines accounted for 71 interactions with this topic as a focus. In the current sample, two rape storylines were included, although neither was a major storyline. There were no visual depictions of rape included in the sample, although one episode coded included a sequence of five interactions in which a female was captured, tied up, and threatened with rape by two male attackers. The female eventually escaped before the threats could be carried out. All other discussions of rape occurred in the context of a past event. In all, there were 13 interactions in which rape was mentioned. In each case, rape was either of substantial focus or the primary emphasis in the scene. All rape references were set in serious contexts.

Prostitution: References to prostitution were twice as frequent in the 1996 sample as the 1994 sample. These references occurred in four different storylines, as opposed to just one in the 1994 sample.

Interactions featuring prostitution were twice as likely to be verbal (n=19) as visual (n=8) and none of the visual depictions of prostitution included intercourse. Over ½ of the interactions related to prostitution involved a storyline in which a male character contemplated prostitution as a way to earn his college tuition. In a sequence of interactions over several episodes, he engaged in both verbal and visual sexual interactions - intimate dancing, kissing, petting - with his potential customer, but ultimately stopped before engaging in intercourse. This storyline was the only one to feature visual depictions of prostitution.

The rest of the interactions related to prostitution featured discussion of either a character's past profession or of a current prostitute's desire to quit. In two cases, the prostitution was motivated by a desire for money

(one to support a drug habit; one to finance his education); in one case, the prostitute's father forced her into the behavior; and in the fourth case the motivation was unclear.

Sexual Interaction Participants

Although the sample included 417 sexual interactions, participants in the interactions numbered just 169. Each participant was analyzed for a set of demographic characteristics.

Age: Nearly ½ of the participants were adults between the ages of 18-35 (49%, n=83). Another 41% (n=70) were adults aged 36-59. Older adults (age 60+) and children and adolescents (age <18) each make up five percent of the participants (n=8 for each group).

Gender: Women were represented slightly more frequently than men: 53% (n=89) to 47% (n=80). This difference is due primarily to the predominance of female participants in interactions featuring talk about sexual activity. Females make up 66% of the participants in such interactions, while males comprise just 34% of the participants.

Racial/ethnic identity: Over 80% of the participants were white (n=138). Fourteen (8.5%) were identified as African American, thirteen (7.7%) as Hispanic, and four (2.4%) as Asian American. Nine interracial couples engaged in sexual activity.

Sexual orientation: All participants but one were classified as heterosexual. There was one transsexual participant.

Socio-economic status: Sixty percent of the characters were classified as ***high income***, indicating the state of being independently wealthy or being a highly paid professional (i.e. CEO of major corporation, physician, attorney). Another 24% were classified as ***middle income*** (i.e. detectives, small business owners), leaving less than 5% classified as ***low income*** (i.e. waitress, maid). (Twelve percent of participants were unable to be classified due to insufficient information.)

Health concerns: Three participants were definitely pregnant and one was possibly pregnant. Only one character (a young adult female) is HIV-positive and no other characters have any known STDs.

Discussion

In reviewing the evidence, it confirms that sex remains a key element of soap opera storylines. In a marked shift from previous analyses, including the 1994 Kaiser Family Foundation study, this study found sexual activity to be primarily visually depicted, although most of the visual depictions were of behaviors other than sexual intercourse.

There is a range of sexual activity represented on televised soap operas, and most of it occurs within the context of committed, heterosexual relationships. Committed couples are more likely than uncommitted couples to engage in discussions about planning for and consequences of sexual activity, and they are shown engaging in the most intimate activities. Couples are overwhelmingly motivated by the desire to benefit their relationship, and their sexual activity is, in most cases, shown to have a beneficial effect on their relationship.

The current sample of programming included numerous interactions with discussions or depictions of planning or consequence behaviors, showing a slight increase over the 1994 study in discussion of the

consequences of sexual activity. Most of these behaviors related to pregnancy rather than STD/AIDS, and most referred to planned/wanted pregnancies. It is also important to note that these discussions/depictions were not distributed evenly across all programs and all storylines. The increase in depictions and discussions are primarily due to the focused attention given these issues by a few characters in a few programs.

In two of the teen-age relationships (All My Children, ABC; Another World, NBC), there were extensive discussions about whether or not to wait before having sexual intercourse. One program featured a storyline about a teen-aged birth mother suing the adoptive parents for custody of her child. This storyline allowed for several coded discussions about the consequences of unplanned and unprotected sexual activity, and about the importance of waiting until one is ready before engaging in sexual intercourse.

The context of a benefit designed to raise money for AIDS research on one program (General Hospital, ABC) provided the arena for discussion of the disease. Further, a popular character on this program is HIV-positive and in a new relationship with an uninfected partner, providing the opportunity for discussions of disease prevention measures.

Depicted pregnancies were both planned and unplanned, welcomed and dreaded. Discussions about the current pregnancies allowed for many characters to reveal their past experiences ranging from miscarriage to having the child but giving the baby up for adoption to welcoming a new addition to the family. The impact of a new baby on a relationship and one's lifestyle was an occasional topic of discussion.

The current study examined the portrayal of outcomes of sexual activity, and discovered that the majority of interactions had clear outcomes. Most of these were beneficial for the participants involved. The explicit depiction of consequences and/or outcomes is important for learning purposes; research consistently shows that behaviors that are rewarded are more likely to be imitated than those that are punished. It is not unreasonable to speculate, then, that the high incidence of beneficial outcomes could increase viewers' willingness to imitate the depicted behaviors. However, the infrequent inclusion of discussion/depiction of planning and/or consequences within the context of sexual intercourse might also give viewers the impression that these behaviors are primarily spontaneous and without negative consequences. By pairing discussion of planning and depictions of responsible sexual activity with beneficial outcomes, it is not inconceivable that viewers could become willing to imitate these behaviors.

Although it has been noted that this snapshot sample cannot be considered representative of the lives of these soap operas, it is important to note the lack of inclusion of any discussion and/or depiction of homosexual relationships in any of the programs. The characters who are either definitely or possibly HIV-positive contracted the virus through heterosexual encounters. The only depiction of a non-traditional, heterosexual relationship occurred in the case of a transsexual female who was involved in a long-term relationship with a man. They were sexually active, and became engaged during the sample time period. However, when her past identity was revealed, her fiancé ended the relationship.

If we were to speculate on the potential effects of viewing such content, we might conclude that viewers are getting ample information about sexual activity that promotes the idea that sexual activity is appropriate and beneficial for heterosexual couples in established relationships. The primarily visual depictions of sexual activity can provide numerous models for viewers to emulate and/or compare with their own activities. Finally, the discussion and depiction of planning and/or consequences of sexual activity that occur in a small number of programs can increase viewers' knowledge about STDs and contraception as well as provide models for engaging in such discussions in their own relationships.

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APPENDIX A

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Ten hours of each of the nationally televised daytime soap operas were videotaped during the five week period from May 27 to June 28, 1996. For the two programs in the sample that are ½ hour in length ("The Bold and the Beautiful" and "The City"), we videotaped twenty episodes; for the hour-long programs, we videotaped ten episodes. Care was taken to ensure that each hour-long program was videotaped on two Mondays, two Tuesdays, two Wednesdays, two Thursdays, and two Fridays during the sample period. The ½ hour long programs were videotaped on four of each of the week days.

The videotaping schedule was randomly assigned, with all programs distributed by the same network being videotaped on the same days. Thus, for some days we have all programs included, other days have programs from just one network, while still other days have programs from two networks included.

Due to an error in video tape transferring, one episode from each of the three hour-long CBS programs was lost, making the sample total 97 hours of programming.

Content Coding

To facilitate discussion of the context of sexual activity, it was considered important to look not only at the specific behaviors depicted or discussed, but also at whether different behaviors are shown together, the context of the interaction within the scene, and the potential connection between different interactions. For this reason, coders made their descriptions on three levels: interaction, scene, and participant.

Interaction level:

A sexual interaction was defined as: "a contained series of behaviors in which the participants behave in a consistent manner." Each interaction could contain multiple sexual behaviors, each of which were identified by coders.

For each interaction, coders identified:

* the types of behaviors depicted or talked about
* length of the interaction and its placement in the episode (starting time of each interaction was recorded)
* participants' names and relationship status
* tone of interaction (dramatic vs. light-hearted)
* if the interaction continued in more than one scene

Behaviors were classified according to four broad categories:

1. Talk about sexual activity: Verbal interaction between two or more participants about sexual activity. This type of talk was classified according to the following criteria:

* time frame of activity discussed (past, current, future)
* about own activities or about other characters' activities
* included discussion of planning for and/or consequences of activity related to either pregnancy (achieve or avoid) or disease prevention
* included advice seeking

2. Talk toward sexual activity/Seductive talk: Verbal interaction between two or more participants seeking to accomplish sexual activity. This category included intimate/seductive talk as well as coercive talk. This type of talk was also classified according to whether it included discussion of contraception and/or disease prevention.

3. Overt behavior involving sexuality: Physical depictions of a range of sexual behaviors. This type of behavior was classified according to the following categories:

* Sexually suggestive/flirtatious behaviors
* Romantic touch
* Embrace
* Intimate dancing
* Modest kiss
* Full/passionate kiss
* Petting/fondling/caressing
* Sexual intercourse and/or orgasm implied
* Sexual intercourse and/or orgasm depicted

4. Overt behavior involving planning and consequences of sexual activity: Physical depictions of behaviors related to planning for or the consequences of sexual activity. The emphasis here was on behaviors related to pregnancy planning, prevention, or treatment and to the prevention and/or treatment of HIV, AIDS, or other STDs.

Scene level:

To contextualize the interaction within the scene and the episode, each coder identified the following characteristics of the scene in which the interaction took place:

* length of scene
* degree of visual explicitness
* presence of a series of special topics related to sexual activity
* amount of focus placed on special topic, if applicable
* tone of depiction of special topic

Special topics identified included the following:

* Use of condom or other contraceptive/birth control device
* Discussion of "safe sex"
* Prevention and/or treatment of HIV/AIDS or other STDs
* Pregnancy and its outcomes
* Prostitution
* Child sexual abuse, incest
* Virginity, waiting, and/or abstinence
* Rape
* Sexual harassment and/or aggression

Participant level:

For each participant in the interaction, coders identified the relevant demographic characteristics (i.e. age, gender, racial/ethnic identity) as well as the following:

* HIV/AIDS or other STD status
* sexual orientation
* marital/commitment status
* pregnancy status
* use of alcohol or drugs within episode
* motivation for engaging in the interaction
* short-term consequences (shown within the scene) of the interaction
* long-term consequences (shown within the episode) of the interaction

The following motivations were identified:

* Personal satisfaction
* Provide satisfaction for partner
* Gain status/prestige/popularity
* Further own career
* Further partner's career
* Establish or benefit relationship with partner
* Material gain
* Achieve pregnancy
* Provide comfort for partner
* To forget problems/escape
* Revenge/trap partner
* Sexual assault

The outcomes identified included the following:

* Obtained personal satisfaction
* Gained status/prestige/popularity
* Established/benefitted relationship with partner, friends, or family
* Gained material rewards
* Career advancement for self or partner
* Achieved wanted pregnancy
* Caused unwanted pregnancy
* Diminished personal status/prestige/popularity
* Damaged/ended relationship with partner, friends, or family
* Caused worry and/or transmission of HIV/AIDS or other STDs
* Hurt career

Coding process: All episodes were coded by the author and three graduate students in the School of Communications at the University of Washington. All coders participated in approximately 15 hours of training, viewing videotapes as a group and talking together to achieve consensus on use of the coding instrument. The coding sheet was modified during training to reflect better the content of the programs.

Each coder independently coded four episodes of one soap opera after the final training session and reliability was shown to be higher than .80 on each of the variables. That is, coders agreed more than 80% of the time on the identification of interactions and on the manner in which the specific characteristics of the interactions were to be coded.

Each coder was then assigned different soap operas. To maximize familiarity with program plots and characters, the same coder worked on all episodes of a soap opera, and were instructed to complete coding of all episodes of a program before moving on to code another program. Coding was completed in approximately three weeks. All data were then entered into the computer by a fourth graduate student in the UW School of Communications. All analyses were conducted by the author.